

THE AVESTA AND THE VEDA.¹

THE ESTRANGEMENT AND THE BREAK.

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BUT amidst this mass of unquestioned evidence of unity we come upon a phenomenon which, at the first sight upon it, undoes it all. Internal differences, as we are all too well aware, have everywhere lowered religious names, and holy offices once held most sacred fall to less repute. "Unpreaching prelates," let us recall for instance, were once not approved by Puritans, and the chief titular Christian Bishop is openly called "Antichrist" by a large fraction of those who profess to worship the same great Lord. Many also who exalt the "saints" with conscientious devotion are termed "idolaters" by their co-religionists, while they, in their turn, hurl back the retort of "heretic," each party to the conflict being doubtless both serious and fervent, while each also consigns the other without hesitation to the flames of an eternal future.

It was still more natural in the first struggles of the Faith with the classic heathenism for the early Christians to find "Jupiter" a possessing devil, or to withdraw "Apollo" through the nostril of the neophyte. No facts, indeed, would seem to be more cruel than such as these which show the dearest gods of one race made the very demons of the next.

The Great Dethronement.

But where—to resume—in the wide history of religions or religious peoples, will you find the gods whom the very men involved themselves once worshiped,—nay the supreme chief one of them, long regarded as creator and at last dethroned, a god still adored by their own close kindred,² those of their present defamers;

¹ Completed from the issue of July, 1910, being a revised and second edition from *East and West* of 1902, February and March.

² The kindred of the very men who now condemn them.

may not alone dethroned,—*transformed* like any foreign god to fiend, and this not only in spite of their kinsmen's unchanging belief, but in fact possibly, if not probably, *because* of it. Yet this is what stares at us from every folio of Avesta, as from many a section of the Veda. Not only have some of the subordinate divinities turned upon their *alter-egos*, but the very name of Heaven itself is violated; and this, as I regret to say, upon the side of Iran. No name more fitted to beneficial spiritual powers could ever, as one would think, have fastened itself upon the receptive sensibilities of happy worshippers, than that name of the "shining sky"; and *Deva* (*to div*) is, indeed, still used by several branches at the great Indo-Germanic family as *deus*, *Deity*, and the like, a household word in Eastern and South Europe (more book-word with the Teutons). And what sounds could really be more appropriate as the tonic signs to mark our recognition of the God-head!

And so in classic times as well *Zeus pater* is *Jupiter*, as *divas pater* was Heaven's father, and yet it was this "Heaven" itself, *Zeus-divas*, which Iran used for the gods of Hell! A great pity, as we may well concede; it might indeed even shock us, but so it remains the fact! From the very Gathas on, throughout the old, the intermediate, and the new Avesta, throughout the period of *Pahlavi*, through that of the exquisite Persian literature (early, middle and late), down to this very day hardly the very smallest trace of a serious deviation has been discovered or reported. *D(a)eva* and *Dev* have never been made use of prominently, if at all,—so far as I have observed, or can remember,—in all our surviving Iranian to designate those holy beings whom the ancestors of both Indian and Iranian once worshiped with the word (so fitted for such a use)!

Its Cause.

And how did this sad change occur, as we must in due course inquire? It might assist our answer if we first look for a moment at a still greater profanity, if not, indeed, still greater blasphemy,—as we might so term it, and this time still quite as unhappily if, as was the fact, upon the other side. *Asura* became displaced. The Indian Aryans, and some of them at an excessively early period, themselves dragged down this once honored name for the Supreme Spirit whom their own still earlier seers adored. *Asura* itself was changed by the ancestors of Indians, as by Indians themselves, and not only changed but inverted in its turn, as in the other case of *Deva* a generic name was degraded; but this was worse than de-

grading a mere generic name. "Deva," however glorious, seldom meant an individual deity till later days,³ while Asura was seemingly at times beyond all doubt a distinct person, or at least rhetorically so used, and as such he had his name taken horribly in vain,—at all events as the great *god-class*. He was once the believer's father,⁴ not only "Heaven's Deva"⁵ as in the older Veda, but father of the heroes that bear the earth,⁶ and even of the infinite "eternals." And not man alone, but "gods" bore hymns to him,⁷—"the offerers of the great race of *Angirases* are his servants, sons of Heaven,"⁸ so three of the First *Adityas* are his champions.⁹ Even Agni, dearest of the gods, is born of him.¹⁰

"Seven-priested from of old forth, forth he beameth
As in the mother's womb apart he shines,—
Eye hath he never closed, the watchful, joyful,
Since from Asura's loins he issued child."

One would think that Asura's place as a god—so far as he was so signally a person—was safe, if ever a deity's possessions were. But he begins to lose it, and before a redoubted rival, who is found indeed uniting with Heaven itself and the wide Earth against him, Asura—for all bow down before the rising Indra (R. V., I, 131, 1). The full celestial civil conflict at length breaks out:¹¹

"O Lord of prayer, Brihaspati, O Indra,
With thy hot bolt split through Asura's men
As thou of old didst smite with daring fury—
So smite to-day, O Indra, that fell fiend!"

And this of Asura, erstwhile the father of both gods and men!¹²

"O Indra, Vishnu, all Sambara's strongholds
Ninety and nine, ye smote, though fastened tight
A *varchin's* hundred, yea a thousand foemen
Ye slew them all, Asura's thousand might."

At last he is totally "ungodded" (called "no-god," *adeva*)¹³ with his once peerless hosts:

³ Cicero's *deus* was often merely "the divine," as was also the Greek *theos* often.

⁴ Or "the dead father" was called *Asura*. R. V., X, 124, 3.

⁵ R. V., V, 41, 3. *Asura* of heaven.

⁶ R. V., X, 10, 2.

⁷ R. V., V, 41, 3.

⁸ R. V., III, 7, and X, 67, 2, etc.

⁹ R. V., III, 56, 8.

¹⁰ R. V., III, 29, 14 (so reading, and not *Dyaus*).

¹¹ R. V., II, 30, 4.

¹² So also retrospectively, R. V., VII, 99, 5.

¹³ R. V., VIII, 85 (96), 9; literally "with thy wheel."

"Bladeless the non-gods Asuras oppose thee,—
With hurling spear, O headlong, drive them hence!"

And this goes back as early as R. V., IV, 23, 5. The *Rishis* foil their tricks,—and in R. V., VI, 7, 2, defeat them, considered as a class. Several of the gods claim to overshadow him—Asura—as an individual (R. V., X, 53, 4). No fall could be more signal. Even the *Dasa*, the "scorcher," (see above) is coupled with him (R. V., X, 22, 4).

It is a very remarkable phenomenon, look at it in whatever light we may. And this occurred in hymns sung by *Rishis* of the same people, in the same meters, and in the self-same line of priests (apparently). Here then is a god, spiritually supreme in one century, or perhaps even in one decade, and yet not only degraded but reviled in another closely succeeding period,—and in the same country, by the same people.

And so, again, we have the question, as of the *D(a)eva* name, though *Asura* is somewhat less familiar. Let us now ask more closely, How did this happen? The great name *Ahura*, as *Asura*, held itself unrivalled in the other land from one end of the Iranian territory and history to the other; it never lost its supremacy. Why did it not likewise continue to be supreme in India as well? And why did the like—only approximately—parallel reverse take place with the name of *D(a)eva*¹⁴ as we have seen: *adored* in one accidentally far separated lore—territorially separated, and *execrated* with dynamic fury in the other. Was theology alone the evil cause in both cases of lost sovereignty?

That the once twin peoples later quarreled theologically on the matters of ritual and creed none can doubt; and that their religious quarrels had something, as of course, to do with their mere geographical division seems certain. In the case of *Asura* this took place not with the division between Indian and Iranian alone, but with the jarrings between school and school among the Indians; there were such bickerings beyond a doubt, and as usual, and this even between *shrine* and *shrine*. To explain this deplorable, but too often recurring, mishap, we must, as so often now, go back to the pettiest of all small causes. Some poet in a favored center had made too brilliant illustrations—this was the difficulty; or some woes predicted by one priesthood there had turned out too strikingly, though perhaps accidentally, correct; or again, more simply and as a familiar case, one community had become too prosperous, so that

¹⁴ I. e., *Deva*.

their especial patron deity must be a little taken down. Such were beyond all doubt the far-back secrets of the thing.

So, low and deep, the mutterings began against the prestige of the now alas! too loudly praised Asura: "Those vaunted deeds of that especial deity, or class, *give flocks and herds* across yon river, or yon border;" "This is the very cause, perhaps, why flocks and herds *are dwindling here*;" "*Asura*, once supreme for all of us, is turning out to be a party-god to the great profit of *those* rivals." And as the negro first neglects and later pounds his fetish, so the Indians began to drop Asura hymns, then to murmur in undertone some fragments in a hostile strain; till at last after some savage struggle they cast off all reserve and openly reviled the god who could so help the hated neighbor and so forgot the days when they too raised his name in song as sweet as any.

This was the true motive of the change, we may depend upon it, as between Indian and Indian; and—take my word for it—it is the secret of half the changes in opinions since. Could things like this have failed to help on, if not actually to cause as well, the differences also between the men of Veda and men of Avesta (and this while they, the future Indians and the original Iranians, still touched each other in their homes), as such like things most certainly brought on the same sort of differences between Indians and Indians in their Southern settlements also *still later on*? The contrary seems hardly possible; things like these must have been the causes here at work. That these grave, and ultimately fatal, differences, with all their mournful but inevitable consequences, had their actual origin from anything like simple and clear differing radical *intellectual* convictions, stirring the very soul and conscience, is unlikely to the very last degree. Why, even the precipitation in some of our own great modern reformations had their impetus from the smallest of all trivial hopes or fears. No, it is extremely foolish to suppose that a purely rational theological antagonism in opinion was really at that early period, the moving cause of the harsh events which followed upon these sub-divisions in either case. Theological rancor,—as indeed to some degree of old, as I have conceded—deepened, and become embittered by every selfish instinct fermenting in the minds of the great leaders; and this to some degree and as a thing of course kept them, as they intended, active both in the stream and at the helm, and more sincere fanatical convictions must have helped on the conflict everywhere and throughout,—but the mainspring of the conflict lay, as ever, in *brute jealousies*.

As the Indo-Iranian tribes extended, the advanced settlements

became somewhat too far off from the chief centers, and the bands of inter-racial connection became at times attenuated. Differing interests,—if only in the great markets in the wider meaning of the term—could not fail to stir up discord. Unequal fortunes nourished hatred; greed grew furious as wealth grew insolent; border friction became more constant as the country's sections grew personally more and more estranged; bloody brawls led on to still more bloody raids, and these to remorseless, inextinguishable feud, until the long fratricidal wars themselves began, and the battle-shouts were deities. As Moslim cried "Allah, Allah," with terrible effect, so each side in murderous affrays called on its favored name. "Deva, Deva," was shouted along the one line, and "Ahura, Ahura," rose fiercely from the other; and in the roar of the chorus the keener wit and the nimbler tongues¹⁵ of the future Rishis too often wove the better words, and silence sank upon the ranks of Iran. And when victory came, with its known atrocities, we can well perceive how "Deva, Deva," became more feared, and if possible more hated (though it was once to both a name endeared), while Ahura as Asura was correspondingly despised by the southern thronings.

The one side in desperate fury cried:

"Your kindred, O ye D(a)evas, are a seed from the mind polluted;
Who praise unto you most offers, with the deed of the lie deceiveth;
Advanced your stratagems are, renowned in the sevenfold earth."¹⁶

I am convinced that this was the explanation of the strange changes as regards the gods of each.

The Results, or Some of Them.

Victory was not always on the Deva's side, and with victory captives were divided; many a Northwestern was carried off towards India, beyond a doubt, and some from amongst future Indians were dragged back to Iran. There, after the sullen peace, these D(a)eva-worshippers became a servile caste amid the subjects of Ahura, and we actually find them mentioned in the Gatha prominently, and in the New Avesta incidentally. There, in the New Avesta, they are at home, domesticated, and to a degree assimilated, but with such scanty civil rights that their very lives were lightly risked. A grim while the other side thundered back with hymns such as I have quoted.¹⁷

¹⁵ The short shouts went back on battle hymns; recall the soul-stirring hymns of modern civil war.

¹⁶ Yasna, XXXII, 3. Something such like, or parts of it in short cries.

¹⁷ The hymns behind the battle-shouts.

smile forces itself upon us as our eye runs down the pages; the form of cruelty is as quaint as it is merciless. The tyro-surgeon might try his virgin knife on them, these D(a)eva worshipers, but on no account could he begin his practice on a believer in full credit. If he "cuts" three times, and all three times his patient dies, his knife must rest for ever. Only if he cuts three times, and all three times his D(a)eva-worshiper survives,—then only may he proceed and "cut" the orthodox.¹⁸

*These Differences and Inversions Only the More Acutely Point
the Facts of Unity First Noticed.*

Such murderous estrangements—as is often elsewhere too clearly seen—only heighten still more the singular effect of the phenomenon of the agreements on which we set such store, and they set the last seal to our convictions. The ancient, but alas! now too often spiteful, sisters, were once almost one, as members of a family. If the chief gods (see above) lost their hold among the Indian-Aryans themselves, how much more was it to be expected that brother deities of lesser magnitude in the two great race divisions, should lose their caste, and that even some leading—if still, also somewhat *sub*-chieftain gods should suffer similarly after they have become the pet saviours of one or of the other of the angry sides?¹⁹ *Mainyu*, "spirit," is indifferent—as a word—in Avesta, needing an adjective to define it more closely as the "evil," though it sometimes occurs alone, and often, to designate a "good" deity. And so, at the first in the Veda; it was "good" enough—though standing quite alone—as "zeal" or "forceful passion" not yet personified, but, like the name above, it became at last, not mere "spirit" as in the other lore, but "spirit anger"; and so also at times personified, while in Avesta it is never the Supreme Devil without its adjunct *angra*.

Then there were the *Nasatyas*, who were, under a still higher name, the *Asvins* of the Veda; but *Nanhaithya* (the same) is a demon in Avesta. Whether the *Angirases* of Veda are the *Angra* of Avesta is much more doubtful.²⁰

Then the *Gadharvas*, gods of sheen-mist, are so high in the Veda that they even put the stimulating power into *soma* (sacred

¹⁸ Vend, VIII, 36 (94) f.

¹⁹ If "D(a)evas" carried havoc among the Iranians in conflict with Indians, no better reason could be furnished for their neglect and final detestation, and so of Asura among the future Indians, not only in civil war between the neighboring Indian tribes, but in some frontier battles with Iranians. Of course, as I have said, the matter by no means stopped at this.

²⁰ For the Angirases some think are mentioned in a good sense in early Persian; but see below as to changes in the same old usage.

drink)²¹ beside very many other mighty functions,—but in Avesta *Ga(n)darva* actually attacks the *haoma* (which is *soma*), as a *D(a)eva*—demon attacks a sacred object in an opposing book.

Kalpa is the holy rite, among many other momentous items in Veda, but the *Karṣans* are a hated band in the Avesta. Even great *Indra* was a devil in the Iranian lore, and little wonder, though he fights the *Drajon* just as the Avesta champions did.

Ithyajah is a demon in Avesta, but *tyajas* (the same) is often not an evil in the Veda. *Buiti* is a demon in the one lore, but *bhuti* means “plenty” in the other; so *Bujin* is a demon in the one, and *bhuji* means “enjoyment” in the other. So other sub-gods and sub-devils fall, or rise, on one side or the other, but the list would tire us. Among the heroes too are many changes. *Krcanu* shoots to save the *soma*, bringing down its keen foe the hawk; but in Avesta *Keresani* is an enemy of *H(a)oma*, which is *soma*. *Gotema*, and his progeny, are singers and heroes in the Veda, but *G(a)otema* is cursed in the *Fravardin Yasht*, etc.

One item aside from personalities should be noticed. Curiously enough *Dahyu*, the marked name for the provinces in the Avesta, is *Dasyu*, which is used for hostile tribes in the *Rik*, and here, indeed, we are so startled by the coincidence that we are almost forced to see in the one a pointed reference to the other. These *Dasyus* mentioned in the Veda were tribes that did not worship *Devas*, and they are supposed to have been the savage aborigines whom the Aryan Indians forced further back, as the advancing white man drove the red man elsewhere.

But were those who formed this opinion aware of the familiar Iranian name? Those *Dasyus* were not only unbelievers, and non-sacrificers, but “people *with other rites*.” What rites had savages which could raise them to the rank of rival worshipers?²²

To finish with analogies. As *Asura* turned demon among the Indians (or future Indians) and *Manyu* with him; as *D(a)evas* were once gods in Iran, in times before the *Gathas*, so in the same lore we have from the same cause, a good and evil *Vayu*, and among heroes with their families a good and evil *Kavi*, and the like.

These crossings and recrossing of gods and sub-gods, heroes and head-knaves, from one side to the other in the celestial or in-

²¹ Apparently the first there discovered intoxicating liquid, and from that quality deemed to be supernatural.

²² Some doubt that the etymology here is identical with that of *Dasyu*. If the Indian's *dasyu* had an evil origin in India itself this may have been overlooked by the Iranians. If Indian enemies called Iranian regions *Dasyu* like their own evil *dasyu*, this may have been sufficient cause for Iran to accept the name.

fernal minuet, do not affect the argument. Let me again assert Veda and Avesta *are almost one*; and, to clinch the matter, I will add the chief item here, as perhaps the most unexpected of them all.

*The Languages Themselves Almost Identical.*²³

Not only are the gods the same, with the history, and the mythologies, but the very languages are nearer to one another than the several dialects of Greece are to each other. Indeed the distinguished Professor Oldenberg of Kiel asserted that these Aryan languages are more closely related to each other than the very dialects of Indians are near to one another,²⁴ than the very Vedic is near to its own Sanskrit epic.

This seems to us, at the first hearing of it, to be hardly credible, but what is really more wonderful is that it is so little known. It is actually the fact that we have a mass of documents from the remote northwest which are verily twin-sister to the south and southeast Sanskrit,—and not to the later type of it but the earlier, to the Vedic rather than to the post-Vedic; and this is true also even of the later parts of the late Avesta. There is one main feature of identity to which we should never allow ourselves to grow accustomed; the *meters are the same*, and the most beautiful of all the trishtup predominates in the hymns of the original united home.

Which Holds the Claim to Be the Most Original?

As to which side bears the fullest traces of their common origin is not so easy to decide. Now the older forms seem to gather in the Avesta, now in the Indian, but that all are remotely ancient as terms in Indo-Germanic speech no expert anywhere has doubted.

I refrain from further items. It seems clear, indeed, without more said that Avesta is nearly Veda in history, features, meter and language.

The Impossibility of Later Fabrication.

If so, to return to our first question, how can its greatest and oldest part be the cunning product of the Augustan age? and on Persian soil where the Avesta language had been dead for centuries? A dead speech can live in literature, and Kalidasa²⁵ could speak no Sanskrit, writing in a left-off lingo, but it would be hazardous to

²³ See my letter to the *Times of India* of July 28, 1909.

²⁴ See my communication to the *Times of India* under date of July 28, 1909. This gentleman was quoting a chapter of my own in Roth's *Festgruss*, in which I had endeavored to turn the forms of Zend into those of Sanskrit; see his *Religion des Weda*, p. 27.

²⁵ As some think.

postulate too suddenly the same conditions of things for ancient Iran as for less ancient India. The scenes presented in the old Avesta, the Gathic, teem with intellectual life indeed, rough and severe, and they do not show a hyper-cultivated finesse. The Gathas almost surpass the credible in sublimity of tone, their age and place considered; but in view of the later over-elaborated ideas of India, they betray a too unsuspicious view of life, and we doubt whether the men that wrote them knew the modern world too well. Not even in the latest Avesta, or post-Avesta fragments down to the time when Avesta could have been no longer written²⁶ do we see the smallest trace of any such malign capacity as could forge the old hymns, working up a mass of broken allusions which depict, in passing, scenes too often far from pleasing, scowling with party passions and all directed to one single aim.²⁷

If Genuine, a Later Date for Them Is Unthinkable.

The fabrication of such productions as the Gathas would betray its origin in every line, while as to the seemingly still open possibility that they were late and still *genuine*, it hardly deserves to be discussed. If there was a *Vishtaspa* at the time of Christ, a *Frashashtra* and a *Zarathushtra*, they could not possibly have then written pure old Aryan with the very names still perfect, and with the whole cast and coloring such as it lies before us.

Either—entirely unlike the rest of the Avesta—they describe in their vehemence scenes which were actually transpiring and sentiments that were personally felt; or else somebody made them up to imitate the half-baffled fury of a group of leaders struggling with a religious-political crisis. This last would call for a letter-miracle, as said above, and the age for this is past (or never was).²⁸ Nobody living high up in the hills of sparse Iran could well have worked up a fiction such as that. It would have been a masterpiece immense. Such is the state of the case. There is, however, always the one main result indeed which nothing here affects.

We can offer to inquiring applicants in the Avesta some of the most delicate, as well as momentous, suggestions in ancient literature. With the exception of a frequent solecism, the passages are all, one after the other, but little disputed as to literal terms in their primal sense. It is here the last step which costs as to the last exact point, and not the first. Our doubts are great indeed as to the precise

²⁶ As a vernacular.

²⁷ The victory of a bold political-religious party in the struggle for a throne.

²⁸ See in the previous communication.

turn of the detailed ideas intended by the composer to be expressed; and it is here that we specialists consume each other. But they are next to nil as to preliminary elucidations, and the cruces often fall in dependent parts of sentences, which might actually often be left unrendered with little loss to the main theme.

No one, as I suppose, has ever denied in any tongue the extraordinary elevation of the sentiment in the most ancient pieces of the Avesta, silly as its later excrescences may be, nor does any one question the subtlety of their distinctions as "to thought, and word and deed." The grouping of the Ameshaspenta alone is a marvel, for they mean God's attributes now personified as the Archangels, and again, still denoting characteristics implanted in His people, with the result of healthful weal and deathless long-life (also much personified), but resulting in an especially subjective future state. And all the elements, instinct as they are with religious vitality, have, strange, and again not so strange to say, their traces in the Veda.

We may remember the man in the fiction²⁹ who objected to "Semitism" as too much immortality, etc. Little did he know that it was far more Aryan than Semitic. While the Hebrew exile had a Sadusaic faith with few glimpses towards the "other side," he came back from his Persion East with a soul all moved by futurity. His God took closer notice,³⁰ and his Devil had more form. His Judgment was to be forensic, and he came prepared to write the Daniel piece with many more. His spirit, the Iranian's, was to be lashed indeed (if bad), hereafter, but it was by his own evil personal emotions, and his pangs were to be "bad thoughts and deeds," while zephyrs of aromatic fragrance were to meet his soul if blest, as it left the lifeless clay for the Bridge of the Discriminator and the Last Assize. In the approach to these a beautiful form was to appear which was declared to be "his own religious nature," or, as some would read, "himself"; and she would answer to his bewildered question, "I am thy conscience, thy good thoughts and words and deeds, thy very own." Still dazed, though not alarmed, the soul would proceed under her benediction, till it came before the "Throne all golden" where Vohumanah, like the Son of God, arises to hail and reassure it; souls of the holy dead throng to meet it; the Almighty intervenes to spare it painful reminiscences; and it enters a Heaven of "good thoughts and words and deeds." But this is Avesta, and by no means Veda.

²⁹ Cp. Mr. Disraeli's *Lothair*, i. e., see my letter to the *Times of India* of September 24, 1909.

³⁰ Spiritual notice.